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Motivation, Practice, And Self-Efficacy And Their Impact On The Development Of Musical Abilities

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Motivation, Practice, and Self-Efficacy and their Impact on the Development of Musical Abilities

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine what students find meaningful and why students value certain aspects of their participation in a musical ensemble. The understanding of experiences and aspects of participation that students' value or prize for themselves are vital in maintaining consistent progress and developing a relatable curriculum that is progressive and creatively stimulating. Interviews and portions of rehearsal and concert recordings were transcribed into written format and coded. I then analyzed the data by first examining the contextual dimensions of each ensemble and then examining expressions of value in an attempt to illustrate the people, place, and processes that made each ensemble a unique setting while discussing the themes of meaning situated within each context.

Research questions for this study focused on what students perceived as meaningful about their participation and the extent to which context shaped their experiences. The following questions guide this investigation:

1. What experiences or aspects of ensemble participation are most motivational to student?
    a. To what extent does educational environment play a role in influential engagement?
2. How do the perceptions and experiences of ensemble participants suggest underlying principles of motivational influence and value within instrumental ensembles?

I endeavored to represent male and female students of a range of ages, experience levels, and, in the jazz ensemble, primary instruments. The primary student participants range in age from 18 to 28 years old with all students having participated in a school music program for at least one year. Data was collected from a variety of sources from April 2019 through June 2019. Data was drawn from individual interviews, observations, artifacts and video and audio recordings of rehearsals and performances.

Participants generally valued achievement, particularly when it related to goals and life aspirations. Students universally valued their own growth, which became apparent to them gradually over time, in a moment of realization or a culminating performance. Students also found proper execution meaningful as they are invested in the outcome. Public performances and competitions presented opportunities for meaningful performances for ensemble students and opportunities to improvise proved to be a potent source of meaningful performance experiences.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Motivation, the eagerness to achieve something that elicits, controls, and maintains certain goal-oriented behaviors is a topic of substantial focus in music education. Music educators recognize that to succeed in the area of music performance, students must practice to improve, and that to participate in the act of independent deliberate music practice, individual students need to be motivated (Miksza, 2014, p. 134). Educators often wonder how to motivate students to study and practice and thus maximize their potential. When researching the varying aspects of deliberate practice in music, music education studies have stressed the importance of motivation and incentive involved in music (Maehr et al., 2014, p. 23). Motivational behaviors are innately marked by choice, preference, intensity, persistence, and quality of engagement (Schmidt, 2015, p. 55). However, there is some discrepancy in theories about the development and origins of motivation and its impact on the development of musical abilities.

Music practice research linked to motivational processes has most commonly centered on general motivation orientation facets, such as the effect of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on musical accomplishment and creativity, but specific ideas connected to motivation and achievement can also be found in the theoretical frameworks and studies associated with attribution theory, goal theory, expectancy-value theory, and personal investment theory (Schmidt, 2015, p. 55). Self-efficacy is a common theme among these theories and may be a crucial aspect of understanding accomplishment and achievement in many areas of music, such as practice and achievement. According to Maehr et al. (2014), it may be that students, who have adequate skills in a certain area of study, in this case music, might have a higher possibility of

succeeding and continuing, even despite unanticipated obstacles, if they have a positive sense of perceived self-efficacy and an ability to harness motivation (p. 81).

Motivation is the initial spark and drive behind continuous effort that is needed for successful, intentional action, and can only occur if people believe in what they are capable of doing (Schmidt, 2015, p. 121). Schmidt (2015) states that participants tended to agree with statements in which success was perceived as reaching personal goals, and sensing improvement or accomplishment (p. 144). Some students might even relate feelings of practicing to feelings of loneliness or isolation, and therefore, individuals might need some form of encouragement and motivation to participate in such a purposeful and decisive activity (Ericsson et al., 2003, p. 103). However, achievement and motivation both seem to be social constructs. According to Schmidt (2015), subjects tended to agree that they learned the most or did their best when working with other students and student success was best defined by mastery and cooperative orientation (p. 145). All of these perspectives point to the seemingly obvious connection between lucrative education and motivation.

In Ericsson et al.'s (2003) description of a theoretical framework for success in gaining skilled levels of performance in a given area, motivation was considered to be an essential component along with amount of time spent in preparation, available resources, and amount of applied effort (p. 91). The motivation to learn in a certain domain may be influenced by the effort to accomplish levels of accepted expertise, as well as the need to escalate above a contemporary society's standards. This aspiration along with the necessary motivation to succeed can lead to a strong desire to practice and excel at one's musical undertakings. When discussing motivation and its initial spark, the desire to practice is essential to the longevity of a student's passion and consequently, rehearsal should be a combination of enjoyment and efficiency. Peter

Miksza (2012) declared in his findings that teachers should guide students towards practicing with musical and/or technical goals in mind, and he also mentioned that the quality of one's practicing may be more important than the quantity of time spent playing (p. 366).

Miksza's (2012) research also dictates that as musicians and music pupils are motivated to work to realize these ideals in their area of expertise, they must mature and exhibit a vast array of knowledge and proficiency simultaneously (p. 312). However, "Dan Pink: The puzzle of motivation" and "RSA Animate - Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us" shed light on how much commitment it takes to persist and maintain effort when learning and developing the range of knowledge and expertise necessary to create and perform music (and how difficult it is to assess) (Pink, 2009, 2010). According to Pink (2009), the motivation needed to maintain interest in any activity includes aspects that are both intrinsic and extrinsic (though many of his points are primarily focused on extrinsic values). Charles Schmidt (2015), a respected and published professor of music, concluded that music students seem to actively try to generate their own motivational reasoning and encouragement, and that whether intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation is apparent may rely on the scenario and the individual (p. 166). Much of the extrinsic influence that Pink (2009) emphasizes is the system of rewards that are in place to motivate each individual in their daily life. Harnessing a student's motivation is imperative to their degree of accomplishment, but the key to longevity of passion and persistence is the consistent building of motivation and the awareness of how motivation, practice, and self-efficacy impact the development of musical abilities.

Important motivational factors to consider include aspects of an individual's surroundings, such as parents or teachers (Dweck, 2017, p. 102). Maehr et al. (2014) emphasizes the importance of frequently ensuring the happiness of students with regards to motivation

(expressing delight or joy through engaging in an activity), to offer choices instead of simply saying ‘no’, and to be conscious of impartiality or unfairness towards students of different skill levels or ethnic backgrounds, no matter how subtle (p. 352). Similar outcomes have surfaced in academic research, as well. In an experimental study of lower-socioeconomic 9th grade students who had poor grades or attendance, results showed that even a minor amount of parental support, such as corresponding with teachers or giving students a place to study, aided students in accomplishing more academically than other students (Miksza, 2012, p. 88).

However, Dweck (2017) also concluded that the praise and encouragement of parents and educators can be a detriment and also cannot be enough if a child does not have some inherent reasoning for engaging in the persistent act of instrumental scholarship (p. 101). A “growth" concept of intelligence can lead to an even stronger passion and motivation to learn and an inherent tendency to want to know more and triumph over obstacles involved with that education (Dweck, 2017, p. 22). When students are continuously pressured into learning specific concepts (or anything), that pressure can hinder student learning and interfere with the cultivation of growth (Dweck, 2017, p. 25). It seems that helpful praise is directly linked to motivation, or possibly the potential for effective motivation and autonomy also plays a significant role. When students discovered that intellectual growth was largely in their hands, they became interested with deliberations of their own intelligence (Dweck, 2017, p. 26). Not only does this understanding have a positive effect on motivation, it positively influences self-identity.

Essential motivating factors can also include individual choice and investment in goal realization as well as self-satisfaction in accomplishment. Successful musical achievement is directly associated with self-esteem and positive self-esteem is directly linked to the level of interest expressed by the student to the concepts being taught (Draves, 2008, p. 84). Draves’

(2008) study points to additional evidence that student-centered education, i.e. informal learning, will produce a more motivated, and ultimately, more thriving student (p. 109). An essential next step is to maintain that motivation that was harnessed and built.

Understanding the aspects of music education that are most meaningful to students—and upon which they place the most personal value—is an important step in making music education relevant in their lives. Music educators have focused much more intently on what is meaningful for students. Philosophers, advocates, policy-makers, and teachers have proposed and fiercely defended a variety of "ends" that they believe music and music education should serve. These stakeholders "propagate, then perpetuate, and eventually legitimate certain paradigms . . . they take to be real, good or valuable" (Regelski, 2005, p. 49).

Hebert (2009) connects embodiment and meaning in music education. He points to chills and other "intense visceral responses" that people experience in music and observes that musical experience is reflected in embodied metaphors such as "movements" of symphonies and "high" and "low" pitch (p. 47-48). "Musical meaning" Hebert (2009) argues, "is deeply rooted in embodied experience" (p. 48). He continues to discuss the idea that musicianship is both subjective and culturally shared, and warrants being conceived of in terms of embodied practice (Hebert, 2009, p. 49).

Problem Statement

While student viewpoints are sometimes considered in music education, the profession appears to view questions of value as the domain of adult professionals. Inquiry into what is meaningful to students requires a shift in focus from the perspectives and values of those adults empowered to make educational decisions to the perspectives and values of those engaged in the day-to-day business of learning.

Predominant rationales for music education have long been guided by adult perspectives and priorities and grounded in what adults believe is valuable for students. Music educators have neither carefully attended to what students find meaningful, nor developed a sophisticated understanding of why certain aspects of participation become meaningful to them. The philosophies summarized above do not necessarily take into consideration the perspectives of those learners they purport to serve. Conversely, researchers who do look at meaning from student perspectives do not necessarily ground their work in philosophical thinking. The intersection of student perspectives of meaning and educational philosophy is fertile ground for exploration. What is most meaningful to students has bearing on issues of relevance and efficacy. Kratus (2007) observes that, while “the relationship between adolescents and their music is potent and deeply personal" (p. 45), music education as a whole has become disconnected from the prevailing culture and thus flirts with irrelevance. He urges educators to explore ways to make music education “potent and irresistible" and to “connect people to music in ways that are both personally fulfilling and educationally valid” (Kratus, 2007, p. 46).

Purpose of the Study

The current study will benefit music education by providing much-needed insight into what students find meaningful about their participation in school music, the conditions that facilitate and impede meaning in various contexts, and the ways in which meanings are constructed and understood. This examination aligns with existing theory and builds on the findings of Hylton (2014) and others who claim that meaning is a multidimensional construct. In addition, it will add perspective to how dimensions of meaning impact music education (p. 219).

Students who are developing musical skills may also need to have a meta-cognitive and emotional understanding of how they perceive the music, both when learning it and when

performing it, in order to maintain a motivation to pursue it (Austin, 2013, p. 108). It could be essential for them to identify and understand how they feel about the music they are practicing and performing. This may also be significant in terms of interpreting the music and conveying that interpretation to the audience. If students are aware of themselves, their preferences and self-beliefs, and their perception of their own learning, they may be more successful in developing their musical skills and learning, as well as wanting to continue to do so. According to Gembris' (2012) perspective on life-span development of musical abilities, we never stop learning (p. 22). Every day brings with it another opportunity for new experiences. Musical ability is no different and this belief in a lifelong stream of inspiration is almost essential to maintaining and sustaining motivation in any musical setting.

Another feasible extrinsic factor in the consistency of motivation is deliberate practice and the influence of competition. Competition could easily affect the amount of practice time and the use of practice methods and curriculum. Intrinsic motivation could also be considered a vital element in the long-term achievement of young musicians (Austin, 2013, p. 45). Competitive situations where numerical ratings are given might also encourage students to work harder and participate (Austin, 2013, p. 45). Austin's (2013) research also seems to indicate that relationships exist between participation in contests or competition success (performance achievement) and measures of music achievement, self-concept, motivation, and attitude (p. 103). Maehr (2014) also stated that talent and sense of competence would largely determine one's ability to benefit from exposure to competitive scenarios (p. 241).

Research Questions

In discourse about curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and other aspects of school music, there is a lack of dedicated focus to what is meaningful for students. The aspects of school music

that are meaningful to students and the ways that music education becomes meaningful are not well understood. This study provides a more detailed look at the phenomenon of meaningful music education by examining what students perceive as meaningful within particular contexts. The following questions guided this investigation:

What experiences or aspects of ensemble participation are most motivational to student?

a. To what extent does educational environment play a role in influential engagement?

How do the perceptions and experiences of ensemble participants suggest underlying principles of motivational influence and value within instrumental ensembles?

Discussions of meaning and value are hindered by the ambiguity of the terms involved. Many words associated with value have double meanings related to apprehension. For example, Dewey (1939) observed that "value" is commonly used both to indicate "prizing, in the sense of holding precious, dear (and various other nearly equivalent activities, like honoring, regarding highly), and appraising in the sense of putting a value upon, assigning value to" (p. 5). Likewise, "meaningful" can be used to indicate that something is prized, such as a meaningful opportunity, or to signify something, as with a meaningful look.

Conceptual Framework

This study aimed to examine what students find meaningful and why students value certain aspects of their participation. For the purposes of this study I used "meaningful" in an affective sense, referring to those experiences and aspects of participation that students value or prize for themselves. Practicing musicians and music teachers are well aware of the significance of practice and its influence on musical accomplishment and development. Many consider practice to be a vital component of gaining proficiency and skill in any field (Ericsson et al., 2003, p. 93). To try to understand the relationship between music practice and musical progress,

many researchers have investigated the quality and quantity of practice, rehearsal strategies, and the effects of imperative influential facets of practice, such as competition and environmental influence, creating an extensive quantity of research on deliberate practice (Austin, 2013, p. 65) but there remains an ambiguity with respect to the relationship between motivation, self-efficacy, and deliberate practice.

Significance of the Study

Ericsson et al. (2003) investigated deliberate practice and concluded that amount of time spent in deliberate practice was a constructive predictor of proficient performance (p .108). However, they also determined that other influential aspects might need to be considered as well, such as surroundings, a musician's resources, and a musician's motivational approach (Ericsson et al., 2003, p. 109). Some studies have uncovered the important influence that student choice may have on student accomplishment (Miksza, 2012; Austin, 2013), but others have advocated that direction is imperative for students because knowledge of what to choose to practice or the approach to use to practice is developed over time through gained experience (Dweck, 2017, p. 98). Regardless of whether it is student selected, teacher-selected, or self-selected by a music professional, rehearsal organization and methodology may help to motivate and advance a musician's practicing.

Conclusion

Motivation to play a musical instrument and participate in a musical ensemble is substantial focus in music education. The role of individual practice by students of any age is a concern of music educators, who recognize that to succeed in the area of music performance, students must practice on their own, without one on one guidance and support. Individual students must be intrinsically motivated to move through the stages of development to become

proficient. Educators often wonder how to motivate students to study and practice and thus maximize their potential. Music education studies have stressed the importance of motivation and incentive involved in music (Maehr et al., 2014, p. 23), but less is understood about how individual young adults make meaning of their experiences. The research questions presented in this study offer one approach to learning more about their perceptions and values. The next chapter presents a brief review of relevant literature.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review explores the existing literature surrounding students' unique understanding of appropriate emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills and their ability to display these skills in a multitude of settings. Individuals with higher levels of phrase retention are better able to accurately reflect on and manage their emotions, have advanced problem-solving skills, and they often display appropriate behaviors in various social situations (Karpinski, 2010, p. 29). Finally, this chapter examines the world that is the music classroom and the ways in which this setting allows students the opportunity to achieve greater levels of self-awareness.

Motivational Behavior in Music

What students find meaningful in music-making experiences has been approached obliquely through studies of motivation. While not all motivators are necessarily meaningful, empirical evidence and common sense suggest that meaningful experiences are powerful motivators. Thomas (2016) reviewed research on motivation and reported that music education researchers have focused primarily on the relationship between attitudes about music and self-esteem, self-concept of ability, and attributions of failure and success (p. 98).

Attribution theory (Weiner, 1974), which classifies students' attributions of their success and failure according to locus of control (internal and external) and stability over time (stable or unstable), has been explored in significant detail (p. 101). Asmus (2014) developed an interview process to examine motivating factors and magnitude of motivation (p. 140). Participants' responses to questions yield ratings of five motivational factors (effort, background, class environment, musical ability, and affect for music) and indicate the magnitude of their

motivation with regard to personal commitment, school music, and music compared with other activities. Asmus (2014) found that students' attributions shifted over time (p. 139). Younger students were more likely to attribute their success or failure to effort, whereas older students were more likely to attribute their success or failure to innate ability. Asmus (2014) observed that the shift from effort to ability attributions took place during the sixth and seventh grades and noted that music teachers often have difficulties keeping students enrolled in musical groups during these years. Research into motivation has frequently identified two dominant learning orientations: task/learning and performance/ego (e.g. Dweck, 2017). Marsh, Craven, Hinkley, and Debus (2013) examined the "implicit but largely untested assumption" (p. 189) that these two learning orientations were higher-order factors of academic achievement motivation.

Studies of motivation to participate in a particular ensemble or activity address value and meaning more directly than those dealing with attribution theory. Seago (2013) studied motivational factors influencing participation in selected southern Baptist church choirs in Houston, Texas and collected data from 20 directors and 956 members, a majority of whom were female (72%), Caucasian (87%) and between 31-49 years of age (55%) (p. 22). Findings suggest that musicians and music students are motivated by all of the factors identified by Hylton (2014), including achievement, spiritualistic, musical-artistic, psychological, communicative, and integrative factors (p. 82). Whereas collegiate student participants in Hylton's (2014) study found the opportunity to achieve to be most meaningful, participants in Seago's (2013) study rated spirituality as the strongest motivation. The importance of achievement for students and spirituality for churchgoers, while perhaps not surprising, suggests that meaning (or motivation) may be contextually situated. Seago (2013) suggests that "participant motivation is enhanced when directors organize and utilize opportunities for socialization, skill development, challenges

associated with performance and operate within positive psychological environments" (p. 92).

Studies concerning students' motivations to participate in school music and those concerning perceptions of meaning and value may cover common ground, however the implications can differ considerably. Researchers who conduct motivation studies often promote their findings as a means by which to move students toward higher achievement and deeper commitment. Authors of meaning and value studies, on the other hand, aim their findings toward increased enjoyment, quality of life, and depth of experience. While there may be considerable overlap, the basic orientation differs nonetheless.

Motivational Influence on Perceptions of Musical Meaning

Researchers have investigated participants' perceptions of meaning in a variety of music ensembles. These studies have predominantly focused on the perceptions of choir members, but have also examined the perceptions of general music and instrumental ensemble participants. Farrell (2013) and Hylton (2014) conducted early studies of perceptions of meaning among ensemble members.

Farrell (2013) investigates how musicians perceive the meaning of recreational vocal music experiences (p. 12). She also investigated whether participants could be grouped into types based on the meanings that they perceived. Farrell (2013) interviewed 184 amateur vocalists from groups including choral societies, church choirs, gospel groups, and barbershop quartets (p. 13). She utilized a procedure in which participants were asked to rank a collection of 67 statements, printed on cards, from most meaningful to least meaningful (Farrell, 2013, p. 13). Farrell (2013) generated 67 statements of meaning from reviews of literature and responses to an open-ended question about meaning administered in the pilot study (p. 13). These findings

support the notion that different types of ensembles either attract singers with similar priorities or promote and reinforce certain meanings for their members.

Hylton (2014) was among the first music researchers to look directly at what public school music students perceive as meaningful about their participation, and his study became a model for subsequent studies of meaning (p. 117). According to Hylton (2014), "the value of music education experiences for individuals is intimately connected with their perceptions of the meaningfulness of such experiences" (p. 125). He suggests that an understanding of what students perceive as meaningful can equip educators to respond to their individual needs.

Results of the main phase of Hylton's (2014) study indicated that all six factor categories—achievement, spiritualistic, musical-artistic, communicative, psychological, and integrative—were positively correlated to each other. The generally positive responses suggested that these students found choir to be a meaningful experience (Hylton, 2014, p. 122). Hylton (2014) believed choral singing experience is meaningful for music students and that results substantiate a multidimensional conceptualization of the meaning of musical experience (p. 133). He emphasized that meaningfulness in one dimension (e.g. achievement) may serve to enhance meaningfulness in other dimensions (e.g. musical-artistic), and that musical ability and musical background are not requisite for motivation and inspiration. He recommended further research into the musical meanings perceived by different populations and related to different musical experiences (Hylton, 2014, p. 132).

Hylton's (2014) study prompted studies of meaning among other populations (p. 103). Wayman (2015) investigated the meaning of music education among collegiate music students (p. 144). Using a procedure similar to Hylton's (2014), Wayman (2015) gathered the responses of 178 collegiate music students to an open-ended questionnaire about the meaning of general

music, then used them to generate the Music Meaning Statements (MMS) (p. 121). Following pilot testing, Wayman (2015) modified the MMS to include 50 statements of meaning, grouped into five factor categories: Psychological, Future Music Goals, Academic-Musical, Performing/Music Making and Integrative (Social) (p. 31). The final version of the MMS was administered to 762 college students in Maine, Minnesota, Indiana, Idaho, North Carolina, New Mexico, Arizona, and Hawaii.

The results of the MMS indicated that students ascribed a variety of meanings to music education. After a varimax rotation, the Integrative (Social) factor had no statements with high loadings. Wayman (2015) eliminated the Integrative (Social) category and reinterpreted data using four categories: Vocational, Academic, Belonging, and Agency (p. 81). Vocational factors were the strongest contributors to the variance (18%), and Wayman (2015) suggests that vocational goals such as "to perform in a concert" and "to be a singer as an adult" may be the strongest contributors to what is meaningful about music participation for music students (p. 82).

Wayman (2015) places statements of meaning in questionable categories. For example, she categorizes the responses "To get things off my chest" and "To be a singer as an adult" as performing/music-making items rather than psychological and future musical items, respectively (Wayman, 2015, p. 167). Many of the statements could fit into several categories depending on the respondent's rationale. Other musical meanings, of which there were many, were subsumed into these categories. In addition, Wayman (2015) used a four- point Likert-type scale (really agree, sort of agree, sort of disagree, really disagree) that did not give students the opportunity to report feelings of neutrality or ambivalence (p. 105). Although this study is essentially a replication of Hylton's (2014) study, Wayman (2015) does not give adequate credit to Hylton

(2014) nor does she substantiate why she generates a new instrument rather than modifying Hylton's study.

Dimensions of Meaning in Musical Experiences

Sugden (2015) found that participants derived multiple meanings from their choral ensemble experience, including musical-artistic, psychological, communicative, social, and achievement dimensions (p. 103). Neither sex nor grade level related significantly to music self-concept or choral students' perceived values of participation. The dimensions of meaning Sugden (2015) identified were highly correlated. "Participants do not perceive these dimensions as separate from one another" Sugden suggested, "but as different aspects of a whole" (p. 124).

Whereas Hylton (2014) found achievement to be the most salient dimension of meaning for choir students, Sugden (2015) found the musical-artistic dimension to be strongest (p. 63). Sugden (2015) considers that contemporary teachers may place greater emphasis on their students' musical-artistic development, or that students are involved in more varied types of musical activities, thus supporting the notion that context may play a role in students' perceptions (p. 73). Sugden (2015) also studied the perceptions of collegiate and graduate level music students, whereas Hylton (2014) studied only the perceptions of high school students, and nearly 80% of the research participants in Sugden's (2015) study were female (Hylton did not report the gender of participants) (p. 100). The age and sex of participants may also have contributed to differences between the two studies.

Ten initial factors that indicate dimensions of meaning: group accomplishment, social enrichment, musical performance, recreation, self- improvement, musical aesthetics, school identity, interpersonal skills, musical achievement, and musical development (Schmidt, 2015, p. 79). Schmidt (2015) observes that the majority of statements with mean ratings above 4.0 were

music-related, suggesting that while other aspects of marching band share great importance for those observed, “Music is central and perhaps the primary source of meaning in the band experience” (p. 145-146). Schmidt (2015) relates his personal development factor to Hylton’s (2014) self-perception dimension, social enrichment and group identity to Hylton’s integrative dimension, and musical growth to Hylton’s musical-artistic and communicative dimensions (p. 148). Schmidt's (2015) final factor, recreative activity, had no corresponding dimension in Hylton’s (2014) study but statements similar to those in recreative activity were integrated into other dimensions. Hylton’s (2014) spiritualistic dimension, which was generated in a study of choral music making, had no corresponding factor in Schmidt’s (2015) study. Schmidt (2015) suggests that the frequently secular nature of band repertoire and the absence of lyrics could lead participants to find meaning in different aspects of band music than choral participants do in choral music (pp. 148-149).

As with similar studies, rich open-ended responses were pared down in Schmidt’s (2015) study to direct statements, losing much “meaning” in the process, and final factors contained disparate and seemingly unrelated statements (p. 99). For example, recreative activity contains such statements as “learn to overcome frustration” “relax” “have a reason to come to school” and, inexplicably, “learn about adults” (Schmidt, 2015, p. 101). The difficulties created by compartmentalizing complex and multidimensional aspects of meaning suggest alternative strategies may be more appropriate for examining what students find meaningful and constructively developing a positive foundation of self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy

“Efficacy beliefs play a key role in the self-regulation of motivation” (Bandura, 1995, p. 6). Not only do these beliefs affect whether or not a person begins a task, but also the amount

of effort and the amount of time that a person is willing or motivated to contribute to a task (Bandura, 1995). Motivation is the initial spark and drive behind continuous effort that is needed for successful, intentional action, and can only occur if people believe in what they are capable of doing. “Participants tended to agree with statements in which success was perceived as reaching personal goals, and sensing improvement or accomplishment” (Schmidt 2005, p. 144). Some students might even relate feelings of practicing to feelings of loneliness or isolation (Ericsson et al., 1993), and therefore, individuals might need some form of encouragement and motivation to participate in such a purposeful and decisive activity. However, achievement and motivation both seem to be social constructs. According to Schmidt, “subjects tended to agree that they learned the most or did their best when working with other students,” and “student success was best defined by mastery and cooperative orientation.” All of these perspectives point to the connection between lucrative education and motivation.

Cognitive Retention

Research into retention has often identified two prevailing learning orientations: task/learning and performance/ego (Dweck, 1986). Marsh, Craven, Hinkley, and Debus (2003) investigated the “implicit but largely untested assumption” (p. 189) that these two learning orientations were higher-order aspects of academic accomplishment motivation. Marsh found that task orientation among high-achieving French students in grades 3-6 was associated with mastery and fundamental motivation orientations, whereas performance orientation was linked to motivation orientations of contest, self-esteem, fear of rejection, and success approach. C. P. Schmidt (2005) reevaluated these findings within the framework of instrumental music education. Using motivation factor drawn from Asmus and Harrison’s (1990) measure (contest, self-esteem, fear of rejection, and success approach) and acclimating motivation orientation

scales used by Marsh (2003), Schmidt created a questionnaire and distributed it to 300 band students in grades 6-12. Results showed that ratings of performance and effort "were most strongly correlated with self-concept and intrinsic motivation, respectively" (p. 134) and exposed three motivation orientations. Learning/task orientation was encouragingly connected with practice time, ratings of effort and performance, solo festival and private-lesson experience, and grade level; performance/ego orientation was negatively associated with grade level and solo festival ratings; and individual orientation linked positively with ratings of performance and effort, and solo and festival ratings (p. 134). Schmidt summarized:

> Overall, instrumental students in this study tended to report that their own success was best defined by mastery and cooperative orientations, while they placed less emphasis on competitive and ego orientations. Participants tended to agree with statements in which success was perceived as reaching personal goals, and sensing improvement or accomplishment. Similarly, subjects on average tended to agree that they learned the most or did their best when working with other students. The results suggest that students may respond best to the intrinsic or cooperative aspects of instrumental music, rather than its extrinsic or competitive aspects. (p. 144)

Practical analyses often form the base of modern music education advocacy efforts. Supportmusic.com, a joint initiative of the National Association for Music Education and the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM), cites studies connecting music education with improved cognitive abilities, social skills, discipline, and overall accomplishment in life. In response to the question "Why learn music in school?" a brochure available on supportmusic.com (National Association for Music Education & National Association of Music Merchants, 2007) offers the following:

Because music . . .

- Keeps students engaged in school and less likely to drop out
- Improves the atmosphere for learning
- Helps students achieve in other academic subjects like math, science and reading
- Helps communities share ideas and values among cultures and generations
- Is a disciplined human endeavor with intrinsic value to society (p. 2)

Studies pertaining to students' motivations to partake in school music may cover common ground, however the implications can vary considerably. Researchers who conduct motivation studies often promote their findings as a means by which to move students toward higher accomplishment and deeper dedication. Authors of meaning and value studies, on the other hand, point their findings toward amplified gratification, quality of life, and depth of experience. While there may be substantial overlap, the basic orientation differs nevertheless.

Musical Participation and Behavioral Skills

Arasi (2016) examined the perceived carryover and lifelong influence of participation in one "exemplary" collegiate choral program. Three of the participants emphasized the achievement of excellence in their choral experiences as the predominant benefit of their participation. Two participants focused on the social aspects of chorus, including interactions with friends and learned social behaviors. The remaining three participants cited personal growth as the most enduring aspect of their experience in the choir.

In her analysis of the former students' comments, Arasi (2016) articulated three primary findings regarding the former student perceptions. First, "teacher personality and approach may influence perceptions of lifelong meaning and value" (p. 189). The participants "viewed [their teacher] as a significant part of the success of the program" (p. 190) and referenced personal

qualities and the "life lessons" she instilled more frequently than the specific curricular content she taught. Second, "adults may recall aspects of a choral program that they perceive as enhancing lifelong learning" (p. 190). Specifically, participants cited increased self-confidence, critical thinking, and creativity as traits enhanced by their choral experiences. Finally, "adults may cite both intrinsic and extrinsic evidence of ways in which their school choral program had lifelong influence" (p. 192). Such intrinsic and extrinsic influences of participation in the choral program included "the desire to achieve excellence; the ability to analyze critically and evaluate vocal music; the ability to appreciate diverse cultures and music genres; and enriched [sic] of socialization and personal growth" (p. 192).

Dillon (2011) investigated the meaning of music among young people in one school setting and the processes that facilitated meaningful involvement (p. 8). Approaching the topic from a curricular perspective, Dillon (2011) observed how the theoretical concept of "student as maker" drawn from his master's thesis (1995) and adopted in one school curriculum was interpreted and implemented (2001, p. 22). The research took place at an independent school of the Uniting Church, which served students aged three to eighteen. The school supported twenty ensembles, and "up to one third of the school's population participates in parent-funded private instrumental lessons" (p. 86).

As a teacher at the site for six years, Dillon (2011) had previously taught all of the twenty-one student participants in the study. Students were selected "because of their experiences with different musical styles and instruments" and because "those with a high involvement . . . were considered to have a distinctive association with the phenomenon being studied" (p. 87).

Dillon (2011) identified three sources of meaning for students involved in music

education. Personal meaning, "a communication between self and music making" (p. 216), was "evocative of a personal response, a feeling of well-being and an emotive and aesthetic relationship with the music . . . [and promoted] an understanding of self as an expressive being" (p. 216). Social meaning, an attraction to music for social reasons, emerged as influencing both "initial involvement and sustained involvement with music making" (p. 217). Cultural meaning, a dimension that Dillon (2011) believed was "particularly powerful" (p. 218), is "about expressiveness and the reciprocal interaction that both the artistic product and the maker have with the community" (p. 218). On an individual level, cultural meaning refers to a sense of belonging within musical community, and relates to self-esteem and well-being (p. 219-20). Dillon (2011) concluded, "the process of music education must provide access to all forms of music meaning" (p. 220). He made several recommendations for building an environment that provides access to meaningful experience and proposed a holistic pedagogy that is "equally inclusive of context, making and reflection" (p. 238).

Dillon (2011) is one of the only researchers in this literature review to emphasize the role of context and environment in meaning, and to suggest the role that educators play as "builder[s] of environments" (p. 185). Reflecting on his master's thesis, Dillon (2011) notes:

> The meaning of music to a student is difficult to examine empirically, as it cannot be attributed to a single source such as music education or to a particular teacher or method. What can be examined is each of the factors that make up the environment for music learning, such as the teachers, the place and the culture of the school in relation to music. The process, participants and context are observable. (p. 65)

This observation is particularly salient for the present study. In developing a situated understanding of meaningful experiences, classroom processes, participants, and context (place)

were important aspects of the investigation.

Music and Meaning in the Classroom

Countryman (2018) asks, “How do students and teachers experience music in the classroom?” (p. 36). She interviewed former secondary school music participants “who had been involved . . . through most or all of their high school years, and who were no longer studying music in any organized way” (p. 80). Some of the participants were Countryman’s (2018) former students; others were recommended by music education colleagues, by university students in classes taught by Countryman, or by other participants (p. 12). Countryman (2018) also invited four music teachers to participate in a focus group discussion of music education practices (p. 14). Subsequent to the focus group interview, three additional colleagues contributed their perspectives based on the themes generated.

Countryman (2018) generated five themes based on the interviews with her own former students: personal factors, social factors, expressions of enjoyment, musical factors, and transcendent moments (p. 42). She noted the similarity of these themes and those identified by Hylton (2014) and Piekarz (2016) but concluded, based on her theoretical exploration of identity making, that the separation of the personal and social aspects of musical meaning is inaccurate (Countryman, 2018, p. 51).

Countryman (2018) identifies three important themes drawn from conversations with former student participants. First, she concludes, “musicking in school music programs is about self-making through social interactions” (p. 123). A school music program—one of a number of worlds in which students simultaneously participate—provides a context in which students can “figure out who they are” through ongoing, improvised responses to collective experiences (Countryman, 2018, p. 123). Second, “when students are in a school music program that honours

traditions and rituals seen by students as important, and when students experience some genuine sense of control over aspects of their musicking in communal situations, they may be part of a community of practice" (Countryman, 2018, p. 125). Countryman (2018) believes that both a sense of traditions and rituals *and* a sense of control over some aspect of musicking are necessary for a community of practice to exist (p. 83). Finally, Countryman (2018) notes the difficulty that participants had putting their important experiences into words. She explains, "The embodied nature of the experience of making music is ineffable. Time and again participants indicated how difficult it was to put the experience of musicking into words" (Countryman, 2018, p. 124). According to Countryman (2018), "self-making, community-making and music making are inextricably woven aspects of the school music experience for many former students" (Countryman, 2018, p. 125). The experience of music in the classroom, she concludes, is a holistic one.

In addition to the themes identified, Countryman (2018) emphasizes the significance that student participants in the study placed on classroom interactions. From the interviews with her former students she heard, overwhelmingly, of "the importance of community, of the sense of belonging that was prerequisite to a sense of musical competence" (Countryman, 2018, p. 89). This, she says, counters the emphasis that music education literature places on musicking as an individual phenomenon (Countryman, 2018, p. 125).

Theoretical Frameworks

The foundational work of C. S. Peirce, a philosophical pragmatist, and the subsequent theory of symbolic interactionism suggest that meaning is socially generated (McCall & Simmons, 2017, p. 92). While symbolic interactionism refers to meaning in an informational sense, I felt that examining the ways that meanings were socially generated in instrumental groups might be useful

in understanding their value and significance in the lives of student members.

Musical Habits and Symbolic Interactionism

Since his death in 1914, C. S. Peirce (1931) has increasingly been acknowledged as one of the most important thinkers of the modern era. Late twentieth-century scholars lauded Peirce for his unique and significant contributions to the fields of logic, epistemology, scientific method, phenomenology, metaphysics, cosmology, ontology, ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy (Goble, 2009, p. 31). Two of his most significant contributions—pragmatism and semiotics—have profoundly influenced the field of music and education. These approaches, and the theories stemming from them, may be useful in the examination of meaning.

According to Peirce (1931), every organism establishes "habits of behavior" that will satisfy its needs. When something challenges an established belief or behavior, the resulting doubt activates thought, which, according to Peirce (1931), is aimed at generating and testing hypotheses about the situation so that one can either return to the old habit or establish a new one. Thought continues until the doubt is resolved and equilibrium—habituated thought and action—is reestablished.

Peirce (1931) is considered the father of pragmatism. For Peirce, the *meaning* of an idea or concept stems from its potential *effects* (Goble, 2009, p. 44). "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have" he wrote. "Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (Peirce, 1931, p. 54). Moreover, Peirce (1931) believed that communities constitute a "collective mind." His examination of the interactions of minds within and between social groups was an important part of his semiotic theory. The meaning of an idea or concept for an individual, he argued, is influenced by the beliefs about its effects held by the individual's community (Goble,

2009, p. 55). Meaning, according to Peirce, develops within a social framework.

Goble (2009), whose dissertation examined Peirce's pragmatic philosophy and semiotic theory, explains that a given musical work or form of musical activity can be said to be *meaningful* for those in the community from which it stems if it is somehow related to the "habits of mind" of the members of that cultural group (p. 91). By contrast, the same musical piece or practice may be regarded as too different, too highly *informational,* when it is experienced by persons who are *not* a part of that community. Since such individuals lack the necessary background to grasp its connection to the life of the community, the musical piece or practice may not be meaningful to them at all (Goble, 2009, p. 79). Peirce argued that an individual or community could undergo an ideological shift over time and come to identify with the beliefs of another community (Goble, 2009, p. 89).

Goble (2009) borrows from the language of cultural anthropology to describe this potential shift and explains that "observer" is the term applied to a researcher who relates to the cultural group on the level of the intellect, perhaps partially understanding the views of the group, but not physically (i.e., experientially) sharing in their activities and emotions (p. 108). Observer-participant is the term used to describe one who explores intellectually and participates physically in the life activities of the group, but still maintains (or emotionally reserves) his or her own ideology as an observer. Finally, "gone native" is an expression used to humorously describe those who have found the ideology of the group being studied to be a better-fitting or more psychologically satisfying apprehension of reality than his or her own ideology, thus adopting fully the concepts, behaviors, and emotions associated with the new ideology, and renouncing the ideology they originally embodied as well as their status as observers (Goble, 2009, p. 81).

This may be salient in understanding the meaningful experiences of ensemble members. Musicians who are deeply devoted to their ensemble may have more completely adopted the group's ideology. As Goble (2009) points out, "the ideological congruity that stems from this unification of individual minds is integrally associated with all musical activity that can be described as socially *meaningful* according to Peirce's definition" (p. 83).

Symbolic Interactionism and the Origin of Meaning

The study of symbolic interaction "is the study of how social acts generate social objects" (McCall & Simmons, 2017, p. 60). Symbolic interactionism stems from the work of G. H. Mead (1932, 1934, 1938) who built on the semiotic theory of C. S. Peirce (1931) and others. Blumer (1969), a student of Mead's, coined the term "symbolic interactionism" and worked to codify Mead's theory. He set forth three tenets of the perspective:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters. (Blumer, 1969, p. 2)

Mead differentiated between *things*—bundles of stimuli—and objects. Central to Mead's theory is a "self" that may serve as the object of one's own actions. A human "may perceive himself, have conceptions of himself, communicate with himself, and act toward himself" (Blumer, 1969, p. 62). This mechanism of self-interaction is, according to Mead's theory, what enables humans to form and guide their conduct. As Blumer explains:

> . . . [T]o indicate something is to extricate it from its setting, to hold it apart, to give it a

> meaning or, in Mead's language, to make it into an object. An object—that is to say, anything that an individual indicates to himself—is different from a stimulus; instead of having an intrinsic character which acts on the individual and which can be identified apart from the individual, its character or meaning is conferred on it by the individual. The object is a product of the individual's disposition to act instead of being an antecedent stimulus which evokes the act. Instead of the individual being surrounded by an environment of pre-existing objects which play upon him and call forth his behavior, the proper picture is that he constructs his objects on the basis of his on-going activity. In any of his countless acts . . . the individual is designating different objects to himself, giving them meaning, judging their suitability to his action, and making decisions on the basis of the judgment.
>
> This is what is meant by interpretation or acting on the basis of symbols (1969, p. 80).

Blumer (1969) contrasts symbolic interactionism with two predominant ways of accounting for the origin of meaning. The first perspective is that meaning is an intrinsic quality of the thing that is meaningful. As an inherent property, meaning resides outside of us; our task is to perceive and understand the meaning that exists within a thing. This position reflects the realist philosophy found most frequently in the social and psychological sciences which undergirds the aesthetic philosophy of music.

The second dominant perspective is that meaning is "a psychical accretion brought to the thing by the person for whom the thing has meaning" (p. 4). In other words, meaning is attributed to a thing based on a person's perception, cognition, transfer of feelings, and association of ideas about that thing (p. 4). This position is observable, Blumer (1969) explains, in the contemporary practice of "tracing the meaning of a thing . . . to the attitude of the person

who views it" (p. 4).

Symbolic interactionism represents a different way to account for the origin of meaning. According to Blumer,

> [Symbolic interactionism] does not regard meaning as emanating from the intrinsic makeup of the thing that has meaning, nor does it see meaning as arising through a coalescence of psychological elements in the person. Instead, it sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people. (1969, p. 4)

The meaning of a thing is particular to each individual but is social in its construction. Symbolic interactionism has become a major sociological perspective, and its influence can be found in other fields including cultural anthropology and psychology. Bruner (2014) advocates a "cultural psychology" that takes into account the influence of culture in shaping the meanings we create. He reminds us that meaning is "a culturally mediated phenomenon that depends on the prior existence of a shared symbol system" (p. 69).

Symbolic interactionism is potentially a useful framework for this study of individuals' perceptions of the meaningfulness of ensembles because it takes into account the role of social interaction and of individual interpretation in the making of meaning. However, symbolic interactionism focuses primarily on how people ascribe meaning in the cognitive sense of ordering information and not on what becomes *meaningful* or *prized*. Understanding students' perceptions about what various aspects of their participation *mean* (as in signify) may help to understand what they value and find meaning*ful*.

Emotions are intrinsic in both the invention and examination of the arts (Prinz, 2017, p. 83). Art stimulates different parts of our brains to elicit a range of emotional responses. It is also created as a reflection of the artist's innermost emotionally burdened experiences. As Paul

Gaugin (1848-1903), a French Post-Impressionist, once stated, “I shut my eyes in order to see” (Pohlman, 2017, p. 237). He believed that the art was merely an external manifestation of the artist’s sentiment.

Musical Expectations and Praxial Influence

The praxial philosophy of music education argues for a socially and artistically grounded concept of music and music education, challenging the field's traditional “absolutist” foundations (Alperson, 2015, p. 2). In an article entitled “What Should One Expect of a Philosophy of Music Education?” Philip Alperson (2015) reviewed the tenets of aestheticism in art, music, and music education before introducing music educators to praxialism as a possible alternative. “The basic aim of a praxial philosophy of music” Alperson (2015) wrote, “is to understand, from a philosophical point of view, just what music has meant to people . . .” (p. 234). Praxial philosophy, with its pragmatic emphasis on specific human practices and meanings, was a significant departure from the aesthetic philosophy that had become predominant in music education.

Praxialism entered into the mainstream of music education in the work of David Elliott (2005). Elliott (2005) views music as a context-specific human phenomenon comprised of two interlocking activities: Music making and music listening (p. 22). Together, these two activities make up musical practice. The best way to engage in musical practice, Elliott (2005) contends, is through performance, broadly defined to include composing, arranging, improvising, and conducting (p. 92). In these ways, musicians can demonstrate musicality, that is, thinking- or knowing-in action (Elliott, 2005, p. 49). Elliott (2005) argues that the significance of music education is connected to the significance of music in human life (p. 23). As something one fundamentally *does*, Elliott (2005) contends, music “ought to be understood in relation to the

meanings and values evidenced in actual music-making and music listening in specific contexts" (p. 14). Describing music as “cognitive through and through” Elliott (2005) sees these meanings and values as primarily cognitive and approaches meaning and value from a cognitive perspective (p. 93). Music, Elliott (2005) suggests, “is valuable and significant in itself because it propels the self to higher levels of complexity” (p. 122).

The conception of praxialism advanced by pragmatists such as Regelski (2005) and Bowman (2009) is particularly useful in conceptualizing this study. As a tool for understanding meaning, a pragmatic emphasizes the importance of contextual factors that are frequently overlooked in studies of meaning (Regelski, 2005, p. 102). A pragmatic view of praxialism, Regelski (2005) argues, takes into account “all aspects of all instances in which ‘music’ is ‘made’ or ‘done” (p. 44). Bowman (2009) explains that praxis is guided by phronesis, “the ethical discernment that is required to negotiate one’s way in the realm of practical human affairs—to act rightly, in light of the potential human consequences of one’s actions” (p. 5). The pragmatic view that the worth of a thing can be measured by its results does not lead inevitably to relativism, however. “The point of phronesis” Bowman (2009) says, “. . . is precisely that *not* just anything goes: its concern is with *right* action, as opposed to mere activity” (p. 6).

In Regelski’s (2005) view, “right results” reflect the intentionality of participants, and whereas Elliott (2005) locates praxis within particular musical traditions, Regelski (2005), Bowman (2009) and others view musical praxes as locally situated. A shift in intentionality, whether by the ensemble members, a director, or another stakeholder, changes the praxis (Regelski, 2006, p. 46). An important question, then, is who decides what action is “right” for a particular situation. In an educational setting there may be many participants each of whom has a different conception of “right results.”

In a pragmatic conception of praxialism, the social dimension of musical practice is integral to an understanding of the overall experience. Bowman (2009) explains that not only does performing involve living through a vivid, embodied present, but this vivid presence is also and always something musical performers experience together, as "we" (p. 147). This perspective emphasizes that musical performance is social and not just about sounds, selves, and "flow" but also about people and relatedness. Bowman's (2009) perspective allows for a musical performance to unify and influence beyond a purely sonic experience (p. 147).

This study utilizes a pragmatic conception of praxialism when considering what becomes meaningful within instrumental ensembles and how particular aspects of participation come to be prized. This conception is useful because it connects value with context and seeks to determine the "right results" in specific situations for particular people. This concept also provides a foundation for studies related to motivation, perceptions of meaning, peak and flow type experiences, and perceptions of meaning as well as theoretical frameworks such as symbolic interactionism and praxialism.

Existing literature provides abundant support for the notion that musicians find many aspects of ensemble participation meaningful. Researchers identified similar meaningful aspects of participation, including social, spiritual, achievement or esteem-based, and musical-artistic aspects. While quantitative studies of meaning give a general impression of strength, they are less adroit at showing the variegations of meaning for individuals and do not allow for unanticipated meanings to emerge. Of the qualitative studies of perceptions of meaning, several are of uneven quality and others neglect context in relation to individual perceptions. Dillon (2001) and Countryman (2008) are notable exceptions; the two scholars conducted rigorous qualitative studies that examined participants' perceptions within particular learning contexts.

Dillon's recommendation that researchers examine the interplay between process, participants, and context is helpful in conceptualizing a situated understanding of meaningful experiences in music.

Chapter 2 outlined studies related to motivation, peak and flow type experiences, and perceptions of meaning while also examining two potentially useful theoretical frameworks: symbolic interactionism and praxialism. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology of this investigation and introduce the study participants.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study examined what collegiate instrumental music ensemble members find meaningful about their participation. As an investigation of what matters to students, this study is well served by qualitative research methods. *Meaning* is an elusive term, and one way to treat such elusive matters is to neglect them entirely. Qualitative researchers are interested in matters of motive and in the quality of experience undergone by those in the situation studied (Eisner, 2016, p. 35).

Qualitative research is conducted when "we need a complex, detailed understanding of [an] issue" (Creswell, 2017, p. 40). Theories generated by quantitative research "provide general pictures of trends, associations, and relationships, but they do not tell us about why people responded as they did, the context in which they responded, and the deeper thoughts and behaviors that governed their responses" (Creswell, 2017, p. 40). A qualitative approach is better suited for an investigation of various dimensions of meaning, and in this study will provide rich insight into the ways that students in particular musical contexts perceive meaningful ensemble participation.

Qualitative researchers seek to understand and interpret how participants in various social settings construct the world around them (Glesne, 2016, p. 4). Qualitative researchers share a belief that reality is socially constructed, multiple, and ever changing (p. 6). This belief stands in contrast to the positivist belief that reality is fixed, knowable, and measurable, and the post-positivist belief that although reality cannot be fully known, measures borrowed from mainstream science can help us to predict and make generalizations that hold for similar groups

of people (Glesne, 2016, p. 7).

Eisner (2016) identifies six features of qualitative inquiry. Qualitative studies tend to be field-focused, that is, interested in the contexts in which people interact, and the objects involved in those interactions (p. 32). To achieve this field focus, qualitative researchers study situations and participants in naturalistic settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative researchers are aware of the self as an instrument of research (Eisner, 2016, p. 33). Researchers do not tend to rely on questionnaires or research instruments devised by other researchers, but instead collect data themselves through observations, interviews, and the examination of artifacts. As an instrument of research, the researcher must be reflexive and monitor her or his own subjectivity. Researchers collect data from many sources in order to gain multiple perspectives, and interpret the significance of what they are seeing and hearing. In this way, qualitative studies have an interpretive character (Eisner, 2016, p. 35).

As noted above, qualitative researchers work closely with participants, interviewing, observing, and sometimes participating to varying degrees in the research setting. This closeness helps the researcher to learn about the emic or insider perspective. Because of the personal nature of qualitative work, researchers eschew the distanced and disinterested voice more characteristic of quantitative work, and instead use expressive language and first-person voice to give a sense of the person behind the words (Eisner, 2016, p. 36). Rich, expressive language is used to provide what Geertz (1973) calls “thick description” giving the reader a sense of being there. Jorgensen concurs, “The richer the description, the more likely that one can uncover a nuanced view of ideas and practices” (2009, p. 79). Furthermore, qualitative researchers pay attention to particulars throughout the research process and strive to retain the flavor of a particular situation, individual, event, or object in their reporting (Eisner, 2016, p. 38). Finally, a qualitative study

"becomes believable because of its coherence, insight, and instrumental utility" (p. 39). As Eisner points out, there are no statistical tests to judge significance in qualitative research. Methods of enhancing trustworthiness of qualitative studies, including triangulation, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, thick and rich description, member checking, peer review and external auditing, and clarification of researcher bias, are desirable.

For any study plan there are a multitude of research methodology considerations. The following section explains, details and directly supports the qualitative approach used for this particular inquiry in order to maximize its discovery potential and positive social justice impact for all those involved. This approach is highlighted and specifically supported by the applicable literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore what collegiate choral and instrumental music ensemble members find meaningful about their participation.

Research Methodology and Rationale

This study concerns the aspects of school music participation that are most meaningful to collegiate students in a music performance ensemble. I examined what students perceived as meaningful within an instrumental ensemble and explored how unique contextual elements such as specific people, place, and processes involved shaped these perceptions.

Setting

This study took place in Los Angeles, CA. Los Angeles is the largest city in California, with a population of approximately 3,976,000 (Statistics USA, 2012). In 2005, Bowman conducted a comprehensive study of music education in San Francisco, CA schools. Upon observing high school and college programs he remarked, "In San Francisco, instrumental music

education means, for all practical purposes, band and band only" (2005b, p. 23). In the 275 middle and high schools offering band, concert band is typically offered to students beginning in the seventh grade, and in 2002 almost a third of potential students were enrolled. Of participating students, Bowman (2009) reports, "approximately 16% remain in band throughout their public school years" (p. 19) with the greatest levels of attrition occurring in middle school. While 10% of middle schools required mandated band participation in instrumental music in 2002, band is an elective at the high school level. In the current study I selected one undergraduate instrumental jazz ensemble consisting of 15-25 students from an educational institution in Los Angeles, CA.

I conducted an initial observation of the ensemble and interviewed ensemble members regarding their motivation and perceptions of the value and meaningfulness of participation. The purpose of the interview was twofold: to document a sense of how students feel about the ensemble and their participation therein, and to provide me an opportunity to obtain feedback on the research processes and potential uses.

Participant Selection

I solicited the ensemble for volunteers, requesting participation from members who were full-time music performance majors and found participating in their ensemble a meaningful experience. I endeavored to represent male and female students of a range of ages, experience levels, and, in the jazz ensemble, primary instruments. The primary student participants range in age from 18 to 28 years old with all students having participated in a school music program for at least one year. The number of participants is 10 and the ensemble's instructor served as an additional informant.

Researcher Role

Qualitative researchers engage in research along a continuum ranging from a strict observer, where the researcher has little to no interaction with those being studied, to a full participant or functioning member of the community being studied (Glesne, 2016). In this study I acted as an observer and participant (Glesne, 2016). I observed and interacted with students and their instructor before, during, and after classes and performances, but did not participate in activities or otherwise engage as a member of the group.

As the primary research instrument, the qualitative researcher brings subjectivity to the study and must be aware of potential biases. If the researcher is reflexive and monitors her or his own subjectivity so that data are not distorted, subjectivity can contribute to the study. Glesne (2016) explains, ". . . subjectivity is the basis for the story that you are able to tell. It is the strength on which you build. It makes you who you are as a person and as a researcher, equipping you with the perspectives and insights that shape all you do as a researcher . . ." (2006, p. 123). Or, as Peshkin (1985) succinctly stated, "By virtue of subjectivity, I tell the story I am moved to tell. Remove my subjectivity and I do not become a value-free participant observer, merely an empty-headed one . . ." (p. 280). As a qualitative researcher I brought my own experiences and perspectives to the inquiry process. I have been a band student, a band teacher, and a graduate student in music education. These experiences have all contributed to my present notions about instrumental music education and helped me to design and conduct reflexive and responsive research.

Data Collection

I collected data from a variety of sources from April 2019 through June 2019. Data was drawn from individual interviews and observations, but also from artifacts and video and audio

recordings of rehearsals and performances. Data collection procedures are described below.

Eisner (1991) believes the interview is a powerful resource for learning how people perceive the situations in which they work (pp. 81-82). Interviews provide the researcher with "the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see . . ." (Glesne, 2016, p. 81). In addition, responses to interview questions can lead to unexpected conversations and open up new avenues of inquiry. I conducted targeted, semi-structured interviews with students and their ensemble instructor at the times and locations most convenient to them. The interviews consisted of formal questioning but also provoked dialogue which lead to conversation related to the subject matter. I spoke formally with student participants for approximately 30 minutes each with the interviews focusing on the specified research questions.

Merriam (1998) states that observations can be distinguished from interviews in two ways. First, observations take place in the natural field setting instead of a location designated for the purpose of interviewing; second, observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview (p. 94).

According to Glesne (2016) the field notebook is "the primary recording tool of the qualitative researcher" (p. 55). Throughout the study I maintained a field notebook and utilized the Voice Recorder application on my iPhone in recording audio containing descriptions of people, places, events, activities, and conversations and record thoughts, impressions, questions, and hunches (Glesne, 2016, p. 55). The field recorder was organized by the participant with all information dated to note progress as well as to ensure that all data is properly documented. The field notebook was also intended to be a method for informal note taking to ensure that all data is

collected in a format that can later be reviewed and organized as well. I maintained a running account of my data collection, including dates, times, and durations of formal and informal interviews and observations. In order to monitor my own subjectivity to be aware of potential biases, I devoted a portion of my notebook to reflective notes and presented these notes to peers for periodic conversations to assist my own reflexivity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was reflexive and guided by "insight, intuition, and impression" (Dey, 1993, p. 78). As I collected and analyzed data throughout the study, I revised and "choreographed" (Miles & Huberman, 1994) my procedures in response to what I was learning. Creswell (2017) recommends a data analysis spiral—in which the researcher moves in analytic circles rather than linearly—as a guiding contour. Following Creswell's (2017) procedural stages, I moved cyclically between data management, reading and writing memos, description, classification, and interpretation, and representation and visualization in order to generate accounts of meaningful ensemble experiences. I then conducted a thematic analysis of the data and discussed my interpretation of the findings (Yin, 2003).

In the initial stages of analysis, I followed coding procedures as outlined by Creswell (2007, p. 152) and Saldana (2015) and allowed categories to emerge rather than rely on "prefigured" categories (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). I examined emerging themes as they related to three dimensions of context: process, participants, and place. Creswell (2017) describes eight strategies used by qualitative researchers to enhance the trustworthiness of their interpretations: prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review and debriefing; clarification of researcher bias; member checking; rich, thick description; and external audit. To establish trustworthiness, I integrated several of these strategies into the research design.

Triangulation in qualitative research refers to the "use of multiple data-collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives" (Glesne, 2016, p. 37). Prolonged engagement and persistent observation are important means of "building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation that stems from distortions introduced by the researcher or informants" (Creswell, 2017, p. 207). Lincoln and Guba (1985) note, "If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth" (p. 304). In this study, prolonged engagement was important in order to establish rapport with participants, and afford the opportunities to move beyond surface-level responses. Persistent observation was also necessary in order to learn the culture of each ensemble, to observe various interactions, and to become familiar with the practices of each group. Describing an action or situation with evocative language is an attempt "to get beyond superficial description to see the richness of thought and purpose that might lie behind the action" (Jorgensen, 2009, p. 70). As Jorgensen explains:

> Actions are imbued with meaning and beliefs that have practical and ethical consequences. Since ideas impact sensory perception, there are ever-present dangers of misconstruing what is observed, claiming too much or too little of research findings, and finding what one expects to find because one expects to find it. Hence, the importance of allowing a situation to "speak" so that one hears and is open to receiving and undergoing it rather than just actively engaging with it. (p. 78)

Potential Limitations

Limitations of the study include a small sample size which may also limit the opportunity to predict the generalizability to other schools and districts. I examined what students perceived as meaningful within an instrumental ensemble and explored how contextual elements unique to

the context and how the specific people, place, and processes involved shaped these perceptions.

This study took place in Los Angeles, CA. Los Angeles is the largest city in California, with a population of approximately 3,976,000 (Statistics USA, 2012). In the 275 middle and high schools offering band, concert band is typically available to students beginning in the seventh grade, and in 2002 almost a third of potential students were enrolled. While 10% of middle schools offering band mandated participation in instrumental music in 2002, band is an elective at the high school level. In the current study I selected 10 participants from one undergraduate instrumental jazz ensemble consisting of 15-25 students from a collegiate institution in Los Angeles, CA. The primary student participants range in age from 18 to 28 years old with all students having participated in a school music program for at least one year.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine what students find meaningful and why students value certain aspects of their participation. The understanding of experiences and aspects of participation that students value or prize for themselves are vital in maintaining consistent progress and developing a relatable curriculum that is progressive and creatively stimulating. To try to understand the relationship between music practice and musical progress, many researchers have investigated the quality of practice, rehearsal strategies, and the effects of imperative influential facets of practice, such as competition and environmental influence, creating an extensive quantity of research on deliberate practice (Austin, 2013, p. 65) but there remains an ambiguity with respect to the relationship between motivation, self-efficacy, and deliberate practice. Overall, as further decisions informed the study's final iteration, I moved forward as a researcher in an effort to provide a solution for understanding perceptions of meaning inside and outside of the music classroom.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Data were primarily drawn from individual interviews and observations, but also came from artifacts and video and audio recordings of rehearsals and performances. Eisner (1991) states that the interview is a powerful resource for learning how people perceive the situations in which they work (p. 81-82) In addition, responses to interview questions can lead in unexpected directions and open up new avenues of inquiry.

I conducted interviews with ten students, and talked formally with student and teacher participants. All formal interviews with participants were audio recorded. According to Merriam (1998), observations can be distinguished from interviews in two ways. First, observations take place in the natural field setting instead of a location designated for the purpose of interviewing. Second, observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview. (p. 94)

Elements

Intuitive data analysis. In this study data analysis was reflexive and guided by "insight, intuition, and impression" (Dey, 1993, p. 78). As I collected and analyzed data throughout the study, I revised and "choreographed" (Miles & Huberman, 1994) my procedures in response to what I was learning. Creswell (2007) recommends a data analysis spiral, in which the researcher moves in analytic circles rather than linearly, as a guiding contour. Following Creswell's (2007) procedural stages, I moved cyclically between data management, reading and writing memos, description, classification, and interpretation, and representation and visualization in order to

generate accounts of meaningful ensemble experiences within each interview. I then conducted a thematic analysis of the data and discussed my interpretation of the findings (Yin, 2003).

Coding procedures. In the initial stages of analysis, I followed coding procedures as outlined by Creswell (2007, p. 152) and allowed categories to emerge rather than relying on "prefigured" categories (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). I used HyperRESEARCH software to encode data and identify themes, and also used MindMap Pro software to sort and organize data and identify relationships. I examined emerging themes as they related to three dimensions of context: process, participants, and place. Figure 1 illustrates four potential themes drawn from literature about meaningful ensemble participation (Cape, 2008; Sugden, 2005), situated within these contextual dimensions.

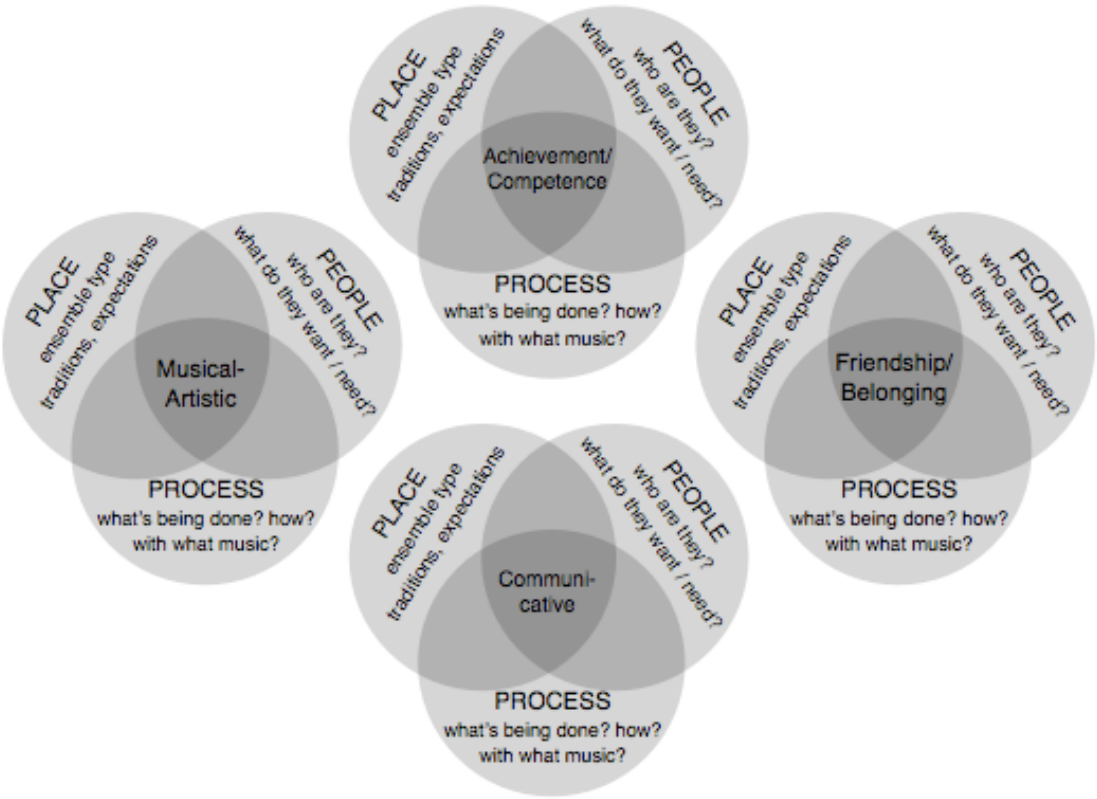

Figure 1. Conceptualizing situated emergent themes.

As I worked toward representation of the interviews, I considered analysis from a narrative standpoint. Polkinghorne (1995) differentiates between "analysis of narratives" and "narrative analysis" (p. 12). An analysis of narratives can be conducted with "studies whose data consist of narratives or stories, but whose analysis produces paradigmatic typologies or categories" (p. 5) whereas narrative analysis uses data consisting of actions, events, and happenings to produce stories (p. 6). Narrative analysis as approached by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) involves analyzing data within a three-dimensional space of interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (place) (p. 50). In order to investigate the experiences that become meaningful to people inhabiting a particular ensemble space, and interacting in certain ways within their group, I employed narrative analysis to preserve the integrity of these important contextual elements.

Thematic patterns of meaning. I compiled an extensive report outlining the relevant thematic patterns, phrases, experiences, and emotional reactions of each of the participants. In this study, students found meaning related to achievement, relationships, identity, expression and communication, and music. The dimensions of meaning identified here are a point of departure rather than of arrival. The aspects of participation that students in this study found meaningful were shaped by the contexts in which they occurred—by the people, places, and practices distinct to each ensemble. In Chapter 2, I presented a model, derived from my own perspective of the literature review, that situated potential dimensions of meaning within the context of each ensemble. This model guided my thinking as I examined the relationships between the contextual elements of each ensemble and the dimensions of meaning perceived therein.

Achievement

Identifying achievement. Achievement, "a thing done successfully, typically by effort, courage, or skill" (Oxford, 2010) is often attributed to the successful outcome of striving toward goals and meeting challenges (p. 22). Thomas (1992) identified achievement as an important focus of motivation research in music education. Researchers have investigated students' attributions of failure and success, their self-concepts of their ability to achieve, their motivations to achieve and the effects of factors such as grades and pedagogical strategies on those motivations, and explored various other facets of the relationship between motivation and achievement.

In his 2014 study of student perceptions of meaningfulness, Hylton (2014) stated that gratification gained through music is a byproduct of achievement rather than competition. The self-efficacy which results from musical accomplishment contributes to an individual's state of well-being with subsequent feelings of accomplishment, success, and pride (p. 129). Utilizing his *Choral Meaning Survey,* Hylton (2014) found that choir students rated achievement-related factors highest among the identified dimensions of meaning. Achievement also rated highly in Sugden's (2005) study of secondary school choral participants. Sugden (2005) identified three facets of achievement meaningful to participants: vocational direction, personal achievement, and musical achievement.

Accomplishment and diversity. Though the findings of the aforementioned studies support the notion that different musical groups reinforce different dimensions of meanings for participants, few studies have examined the diversity of these dimensions within each setting. Though common to some students within the same ensemble, the dimensions of meaning that participants valued most operated very differently within each participant. How students defined

achievement, the ways that they related to one another, the kinds of music they perceived as most compelling and the reasons why, were distinct details to each participant and were shaped by the ensemble content and also by the its specific practices and the intentions of its members and instructor (Figure 2).

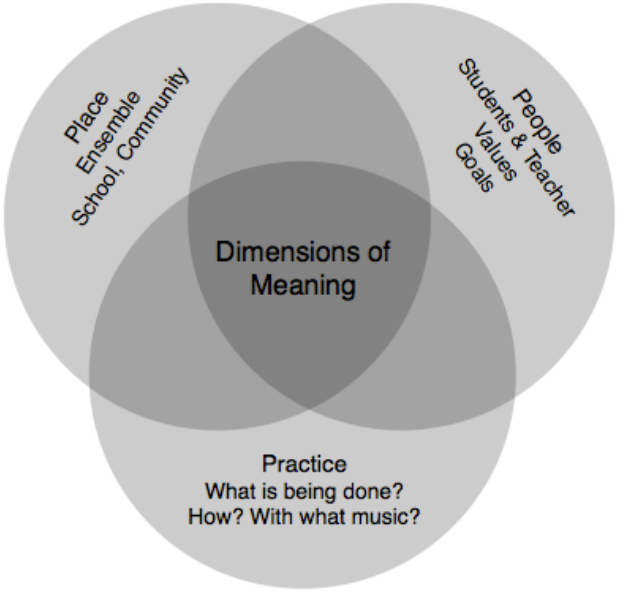

Figure 2. Dimensions of meaning situated within contextual elements of place, people, and practice.

Contextual meaning. Though these dimensions were present they operated very differently. The aspects of participation that students in this study found meaningful were shaped by the contexts in which they occurred which include the people, places, and practices distinct to the ensemble. In Chapter 2, I presented a model, derived from my own thinking and from the literature, that situated potential dimensions of meaning within the context of each ensemble (Figure 3). I examined emerging themes as they related to three dimensions of context: process, participants, and place. Figure 3 illustrates four potential themes drawn from literature about meaningful ensemble participation (Cape, 2008; Sugden, 2005), situated within these contextual

dimensions. This model guided my analysis of the relationships between the contextual elements of each ensemble and the dimensions of meaning perceived therein.

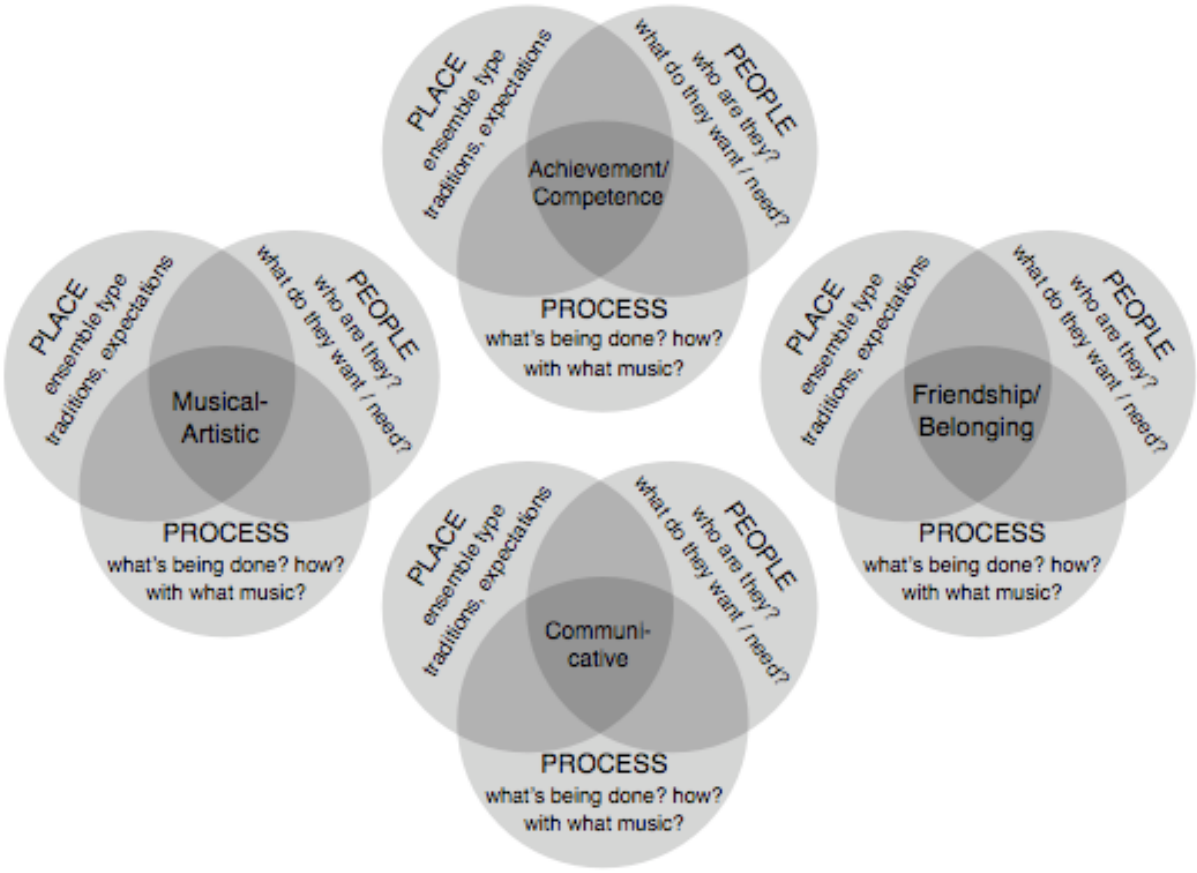

Figure 3: Situated themes, as presented in Chapter 2.

Theme I: Individual Achievement/Competence

Students in the jazz ensemble who were interviewed pursued a sense of individual achievement. Most students wanted to see evidence of their own progress as well as overall success of the ensemble as perceived by an audience. Individual achievement played a different role and students in emphasized individual achievement with a personal influence. The ensemble members derived a sense of accomplishment from their own musical progress and one student stated said he enjoyed being involved in music because he is driven by a sense of

accomplishment felt from overcoming a challenge and mastering a difficult composition. Multiple students also referenced a sense of self-validation in addition to feelings of accomplishment when achieving their goals.

Theme II: Musical Improvisation/Artistic Ability

Improvisation is an important part of the jazz idiom, and most students who were interviewed enjoyed improvisation and felt a sense of individual achievement when they believe they executed an improvised solo at a high skill-level, especially during a live performance. Ensemble members enjoyed being heard and recognized for their skill and musicianship. One member enjoyed when members of an audience responded well to a solo he played and memorable exchanges in live performance was a consistent theme that students emphasized in interviews. One student stated, “We loved playing that, just unleashing into it everything we had and challenging each other, stealing some of his ideas . . . battling back and forth.” On the contrary, students who were not as adept to improvisation did not find as much meaning in the execution or the act of improvisation.

Individual achievement was particularly meaningful when students in the ensemble encountered challenges that tested their abilities. For example, one guitarist felt a tremendous sense of achievement when she finally mastered her part in “Third Wind,” a challenging Pat Metheny composition with a challenging solo section that she had been practicing for months. These moments often resulted from live performances as one student stated. “Once you finally get it and finally do your performance, it’s like, ‘Oh, that felt *so* good!” The student recognized moments of individual achievement on her instrument but also stated that achievement was usually a more gradual process for her and that progression can be motivational. Three students

shared that they struggled to execute challenging repertoire but could see progress more clearly in retrospect.

Theme III: Communicative Group Achievement

The ensemble was composed of members with varying degrees of motivation and dedication. As a result, those musicians who wished to perform at a high level lacked the confidence to succeed as an ensemble, while those who wished to focus on enjoyment were hindered by pressure and tensions within the ensemble. Due to this added pressure many students focused on their achievement as individuals.

Students were generally uncomfortable with taking risks and making themselves vulnerable, particularly when improvising. Some students feared embarrassment when improvising and multiple students indicated that this apprehension within the context of jazz band was extremely uncomfortable. Some jazz students felt comfortable taking risks, but others doubted their abilities. Risk led to meaningful achievements and improved self-efficacy when students maintained confidence in their abilities with the belief that they obtained the skills necessary to succeed. Ensemble members were also more willing to take risks when they trusted their instructor and were confident that they had the guidance from their superior and support from their peers.

Theme IV: Friendship/Belonging

Farrell's (2013) investigation of adult recreative choir members' perceptions of meaningful participation revealed social and communal aspects (referred to as "integrative") to be important sources of meaningful experience. Of 67 statements representing eight factors of meaning only two items were "consensus statements" for participants: "To enjoy the fellowship the group" and "To join with others in a common effort" (p. 75). Subsequent studies of ensemble

members' perceptions of meaningful participation found social dimensions to be important (Hylton, 2014). Dillon (2001) stated that social meaning attracted and sustained students' involvement in ensemble music making, while Countryman (2008) concluded that ensemble performances are inextricably woven aspects of the high school music experience for many former students (p. 32).

Relationships. The relationships formed and strengthened through participation were important to the students and also fueled motivation. Student musicians valued the connections they shared with their peers and instructor, and experienced camaraderie with a sense of purpose within the ensemble dynamic. Sociable interactions during and outside of rehearsals helped strengthen the relationships of participants in addition to the commonality of shared goals and experiences. The instructor also influenced relationships within the group based on the proposed curriculum and also by modeling caring and concern for the students as musicians and people.

Socializing. Relationship and culture were consistent themes when discussing meaning and priorities within the ensemble. While the members enjoyed these sociable interactions, they also received direction from their instructor which sometimes included reprimanding. The instructor often asked students to focus instead of socializing but would also lose focus on occasion and develop isolated conversations with a group of students or tell stories to the class. Ensemble members were noticeably aware that socializing impacted their progress. Once student remarked, "I don't think it is too bad that we get off topic; if we do get off topic, it is usually not for a bad reason."

Students often focused their frustrations on the more inexperienced students in the class and the instructor also criticized students for being unprepared. While socializing contributed to a relaxed environment, it also imposed strains on interpersonal connections as well as progress

and development. However, these informal interactions helped strengthen individual relationships between ensemble members and encouraged a sense of community. The instructor also welcomed students into the rehearsal room to socialize in between classes and during lunch period. Supported by school administration, students decorated the room, left notes and drew pictures, and added their personal touches to the classroom (within reason). Students were able to socialize in the lounge area while music classes were in progress as long as they did not interrupt or cause a disturbance.

Aspirations within the ensemble. Ensemble members also voiced importance of varying goals and priorities. These differences can affect development and connections within group members. One student stated, "I'm looking forward to graduation, I'm getting more and more frustrated with my band. Some people want to keep getting more and more intense and some people don't." Many group members had different opinions about their perceptions of meaning within the jazz ensemble which contributed to tension. The instructor did not emphasize the potential outcome of unity and cooperation within the ensemble so students were forced to individually assess their own efforts and the likelihood of their success which caused some conflicting approaches that influence motivation.

At first glance, the influence of context on meaningful engagement may seem minimal. Dimensions of meaning (the categories of meaning identified by researchers) identified in this and numerous other studies of ensemble participation have related to achievement, relationships, identity, and communication and have been fairly consistent across different contexts. However, the findings of this study suggest that context and teacher influence play a substantial role in both the kinds of meanings most salient to participants and in the ways that dimensions of meaning operate for them.

Teacher Caring

Noddings (2002) defines education as "a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation" (p. 283) and believes that educators have an ethical responsibility to support students with compassion. Noddings (2002) also believes educators should be ethical role models. "To support her students as ones-caring, [the teacher] must show them herself as one-caring" (Noddings, 2002, p. 178). In this study, the instructor cared for students and supported their personal, social, and musical growth in multiple ways.

Compassion and relevant application. The instructor cared about his students' musicianship and was most passionate about students who exemplified dedication to their instrument and ensemble. However, he had some difficulty with relating to students who experienced challenges with their development and sometimes became frustrated with those who did not show regular signs of improvement. Noddings (2002) stated that students want to feel adequate in their "own world of experience" (p. 178) and suggests that the instructor has two major tasks: "To stretch the student's world by presenting an effective selection of that world with which she is in contact, and to work cooperatively with the student in his struggle toward competence in that world" (p. 178). The instructor cared for his students by selecting challenging and relatable repertoire and encouraging students to express themselves as individuals through music. Students who were self-sufficient thrived in this environment but those needing extra attention sometimes felt inadequate and unsupported.

Identity

Meaningful identity. Ericsson (2003) characterized the developmental stage experienced during adolescence as "Identity versus Role Confusion," during which adolescents are primarily

interested in exploring their current identity and future goals. Ericsson (2003) believed that adolescents need to establish a sense of individuality from peers and family and a sense of unity and belonging within a social group. Montessori (1976) also viewed adolescence as characterized by the construction of a social self. In this study I highlight the meaning students found related to identity, both their sense of individuality and distinctness, as well as their sense of affiliation and belonging within the group (Figure 4).

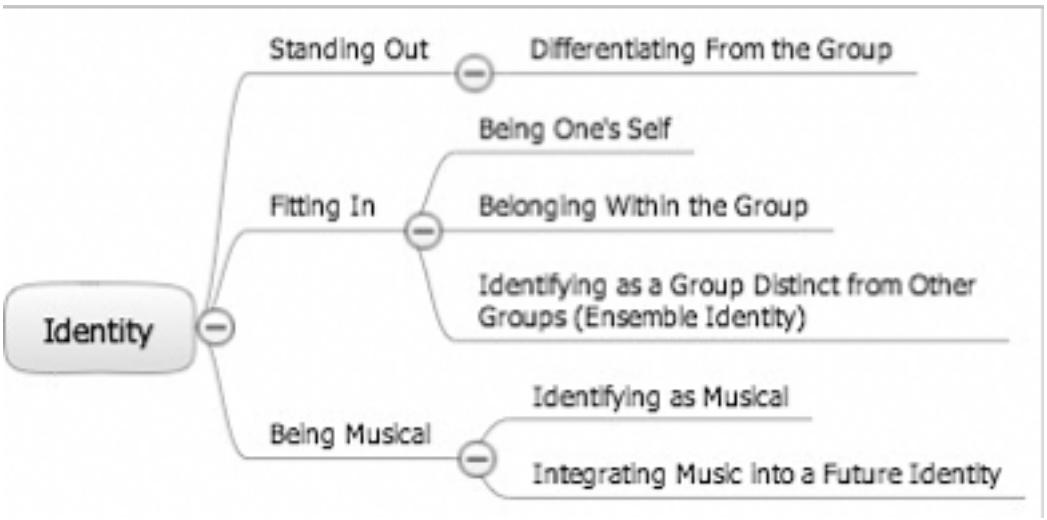

Figure 4. Students' perceptions of meaning related to identity.

Music and self-awareness. Music can be a powerful facilitator of identity, both individually and within groups. Bowman (2002) writes, "Musical meanings and values are fundamentally intersubjective affairs and musics play important roles in creating and sustaining both individual and collective identity" (p. 59). Bowman (2002) states that music is a ritual enactment of identity and argues that learning to perform music is ultimately a matter of learning to experience the self as an identity in the making (p. 101). Bowman (2002) also characterizes music making as a, "playful space" wherein the self is open to the possibilities of other identities that are, "similar and different, yet always connected" (p. 101). Small (1998) further contends, "To affirm and celebrate our relationships through musicking, especially in the company with

like-feeling people, is to explore and celebrate our sense of who we are, to make us feel more fully ourselves" (p. 142).

Group psychology. In studies concerning perceptions of meaningful participation, various researchers have examined the connections between music and self and group perceptions. Hylton (2014) identified a psychological dimension of participation as meaningful to student choir participants. Statements in the psychological factor category indicated that choral experience is meaningful in that it helps to make one aware of his or her identity (p. 129). Farrell (2013) and Sugden (2005) also identified a psychological dimension of participation. However, Farrell (2013) defined it as, "personal experience, emotional effect, satisfaction of needs" (p. 41) while Sugden associated the psychological dimension with "development of the self" including "opportunities for self-discovery, relaxation, and development of self-discipline" (p. 110).

Evolution as a scholar and musician. Countryman (2008) indicated the importance of identity to student ensemble participants and interviewed former school music participants to determine how they experienced music. Countryman (2008) concluded that the experience of creating music within high school music programs is experience in authoring the self. That self is multiple, socially constructed, always in formation, and never static. The result is that students' ongoing, improvised responses to collective experiences affect the development and establish of identity (Countryman, 2008, p. 223). Participants in these studies indicated that their identity within their respective ensembles is meaningful to them as musicians and students. This study emphasizes the meaning that students discover related to identity and their sense of individuality and distinctness as well as their sense of affiliation and self-efficacy within the group.

For some, ensemble participation provided students with opportunities to obtain recognition from their peers and family members. Ensemble members also valued opportunities for performance and to express their individual voice within the ensemble. The instructor required each member of the group to perform their own solos and he encouraged students to improvise at least one solo during school concerts. As previously stated, this had a negative impact for some students and potentially affected their identity and motivational development.

Musicality

The quality of music and performance was a significant priority in the identities of most students who were interviewed. As Countryman (2008) observed, "The school music world is only one of a number of worlds in which a student simultaneously participates" (p. 223). Students in this study derived their musical identities from a wide variety of sources, constructed not just in the present but also over the course of students' lives. Consistent with Ericsson's (2003) view that adolescents contemplate the past, present, and plausible future as they form identities, the students in this study considered their present identity, potential evolution, and future development. The instructor also influenced jazz students to be confident in music as a future commitment and career path. By treating the jazz band students as musicians and by regularly suggesting future employment options, the instructor offered a perspective and vision which was motivational and inspiring for some students.

Expression and Communication

Dissanyake (2004) describes the arts and states, "Making and making special, are inseparable from the innate human impulse to share feelings and from the need and ability to express ourselves in relationship with others" (p. 72). Dissanayake (2004) believes that the arts evolved from the basic human need to connect with others and to share experience. Music is both

a potent and ubiquitous medium through which to convey thoughts, feelings, and experiences. In prior studies of musical meaningfulness, researchers found that participants valued the opportunities to communicate and express themselves through music (Countryman, 2008). Some participants in this study described performance as communicating to an audience through music while others articulated the importance of expressing themselves regardless of an audience.

Emotional response. Eisner (2002) writes that the arts, including music, "invite children to pay attention to the environment's expressive features and to the products of their imagination and to craft a material so that it expresses or evokes an emotional response to it" (p. 23). For some participants, musical expression is primarily an emotional response to the world around them and an opportunity for individual expression as opposed to an attempt to communicate with others. In describing what they found meaningful, students often used "expression" and "communication" interchangeably.

Multiple students also talked about expressing themselves through their instruments as an embodied and physical performance. One student said he loved playing the trombone because, "It's a lot more physical. I guess like when you're frustrated I just release it into my trombone because—I guess my parents are deaf by now—I play really really really loud. It makes me feel good." Another student had a similar perception of playing the trombone and stated, "I love the tone it produces . . . [and] I love playing it too. The slide, it just seems to be a more natural and connected thing as opposed to keys. It's literally using your arms and adjusting the length of the slide. It just kind of feels more natural."

Communication in other aspects. Some students talked about communication and expression through music outside of the jazz ensemble. Multiple students stated that their motivation is derived from the ability to express themselves on their instruments and also

attributed their mental health to their ability to perform and communicate through music. Other members similarly valued expression but lacked confidence in their ability to adequately express themselves in a performance setting. One student mentioned, “I can’t really make up a solo and pour my heart and soul into it. I’m not really a musical artist because I’m not really that skilled, but it’s something I’d like to go toward.” Despite the emphasis on soloing and creativity most jazz band members did not find expression or communication to be meaningful aspects of their experience. The lack of cohesion and musicality were expressed as a potential impediment for others. Participants may also have felt inhibited in a potentially judgmental environment that is not conducive to the risk and trust required in effective communication.

Musical Knowledge

Musical comprehension. Elliott (1995) identified two ways of comprehending music: verbally, which includes reading and no direct contact with music, and procedurally, which involves engaging in music though creation or enjoyment. What Elliott (1995) calls formal knowledge (theoretical and historical) is most often acquired verbally, though it can also be acquired procedurally. Other forms of knowledge include informal, impressionistic, and supervisory knowledge which Elliott (1995) argues can only be acquired through procedural ways of learning.

Musical exposure. As students participate in their ensemble, they gain experience that shapes their music listening as well. Exposure to varying styles and genres encountered in class influenced students to expand how they listen and explore other forms of music. As students gain expertise as musicians, their procedural knowledge comes to inform the act of listening with some students describing the act of listening to music as one that evolves regularly. One student stated that her newfound theoretical knowledge allows her to appreciate music and musical

ability. “You can tell the difference between a musician listening to music and a non-musician listening to music. I’m now a musician listening to music and I now see the difference. If you don’t know a lot of music then all you can really like about it is how it sounds. Once you learn what’s going on . . . it just makes that song so much better.”

Music as Product and Process

Hylton’s (2004) knowledge-focused dimension is only one perspective on how students find music meaningful. In this study, students generally valued the knowledge obtained from studying music in addition to the creation and performance. The sounds of the music they created as well as the processes and social engagements involved in creating them contributed to their motivational and emotional development. For participants in this study, music became meaningful as it served a variety of functions and facilitated a range of experiences.

Ensemble members enjoyed playing energetic, challenging repertoire for the sense of achievement and growth but were also driven by the enjoyment they experienced. The instructor often emphasized the process of learning jazz over the value of performance, however students also wanted to develop as musicians and were frustrated when their performances did not meet their individual standards. These ensemble members rely on their musicianship and find music meaningful for reasons related to achievement, connection, and expression, but are often stymied by ineffective rehearsal practices and interpersonal tensions.

In the following chapter I will briefly summarize the study and present a recapitulation of themes with an expansion of key ideas. I will then look at the role of context in shaping what students perceive as meaningful and identify conditions in which meaningful experiences are more likely to occur based on a qualitative analysis of interview transcripts.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine what students find meaningful and why students value certain aspects of their participation in a musical ensemble. The understanding of experiences and aspects of participation that students' value or prize for themselves are vital in maintaining consistent progress and developing a relatable curriculum that is progressive and creatively stimulating. Interviews and portions of rehearsal and concert recordings were transcribed into written format and coded. I then analyzed the data by first examining the contextual dimensions of each ensemble and then examining expressions of value in an attempt to illustrate the people, place, and processes that made each ensemble a unique setting while discussing the themes of meaning situated within each context.

Research questions for this study focused on what students perceived as meaningful about their participation and the extent to which context shaped their experiences. The following questions guide this investigation:

What experiences or aspects of ensemble participation are most motivational to student?

a. To what extent does educational environment play a role in influential engagement?

How do the perceptions and experiences of ensemble participants suggest underlying principles of motivational influence and value within instrumental ensembles?

Recapitulation

Participants generally valued achievement, particularly when it related to goals and life aspirations. Students universally valued their own growth, which became apparent to them gradually over time, in a moment of realization or a culminating performance. Students also

found proper execution meaningful as they are invested in the outcome. Public performances and competitions presented opportunities for meaningful performances for ensemble students and opportunities to improvise proved to be a potent source of meaningful performance experiences.

Most students also derived substantial meaning from the relationships they formed and fostered within the ensemble. As with other dimensions of meaning, students valued relationship in ways that were complex and variegated. Group music making provided students with commonality that facilitated connections and created a sense of community and belonging. Themes of achievement and relationship were interconnected. For example, some participants valued the fun they had together as a group, but social interactions at times detracted from their progress and diminished opportunities for meaningful achievement. Several participants mentioned that the close relationships of the "team" members made their achievements much more meaningful.

While achievement and relationship emerged as a consistent theme, other significant dimensions of meaning were observed. Participants encountered opportunities to explore who they were as individuals and as members of a group and to consider possible future identities related to music. Several participants explicitly discussed their identities related to music and group participation. For most, identity was implicit in comments about recognition, self-efficacy, and social interaction. Some participants valued opportunities to distinguish themselves as individuals and enjoyed being acknowledged in solo and ensemble settings. However, participants valued these opportunities to distinguish themselves only when they felt confident that they would receive support. Those who felt apprehensive about exposing an aspect of musicianship that they were not comfortable with preferred not to be acknowledged. Supportive

relationships and a sense of community were crucial for students to derive meaning from being recognized and acknowledged.

Other participants found a sense of identity in belonging to a group with a unified goal. Expression and communication were strongly present for some participants in this study but not a salient part of the experience for others. Students valued the musical knowledge they gained as a result of participation including formal knowledge and technical and artistic expertise and experienced music as both product and process: something found meaningful and a conduit through which to access other dimensions of meaning. For various participants music offered challenge and facilitated achievement, unity and a social dynamic, fostered a sense both of uniqueness and affiliation necessary for an integrated self-identity, and provided a conduit for self-expression and communication. Asked how the music itself fit into his experience, one participant articulated the notion that music is multidimensional and meaningful in multiple personal ways.

While this study has benefited from the examination of meaning as a multidimensional construct some students experienced meaning holistically, a finding echoed by Countryman (2008) and Sugden (2005). Achievement helped to reinforce identity, which influenced relationships and communication. The most meaningful experiences and aspects of participation described by students consisted of multiple dimensions. These findings align with the findings of other studies examining participant perceptions of meaning, including the foundational studies of Farrell (1972) and Hylton (1980). Across these investigations, students indicated that they valued variations of these same attributes: achievement and success, social and community interactions, communicating through music, opportunity for growth, and the opportunity to create music.

Students in this study perceived multiple dimensions of meaning to be integral to their musical experience.

Meanings in Context

At first glance, the influence of context on meaningful engagement may seem minimal. Dimensions of meaning (the categories of meaning identified by researchers) identified in this and other studies of ensemble participation have related to achievement, relationships, identity, communication, spirituality, and music and have been fairly consistent across different contexts and varying populations. However, the findings of this study suggest that context plays a substantial role in the dimensions of meaning and their individual and personal influence.

Praxial meaning. In Chapter 2 I identified praxial philosophy as a potentially useful theoretical framework because it considers the individuality and variability of musical meanings. As the study progressed, praxial philosophy became increasingly more useful. In proposing a praxial philosophy of music education, Alperson (1991) suggested that music should be understood "in terms of the variety of meaning and values evidenced in actual practice in particular cultures" (p. 233). Regelski (1996) builds upon this praxial philosophy, stating that that a musical praxis is "a doing" guided by phronesis (practical wisdom) to achieve optimum results for particular situations (p. 24). Over the course of this study I examined the praxis of the ensemble and talked with participants about how they experienced that praxis. The findings presented here are the aspects and experiences perceived as meaningful by the student participants. These results emerged from a praxis influenced by various stakeholders, most immediately the teacher and students but also by school and district administration, parents, and community members, and by special interest groups, government, and other interested members

of society. Contextual factors outside the classroom thus have the potential to shape what students perceive as meaningful by influencing the praxis of the group.

To summarize, the praxis of each group was influenced by contextual elements of place, people, practices, and expectations at the local, communal, and societal levels. Each praxis emphasized certain dimensions of meaning more strongly than others, and shaped the ways those dimensions functioned for students. I have examined the context of meaning by describing the praxis of each group; another way to articulate this phenomenon is through philosophy, which focuses on particular contexts within frames of time and experience.

Place philosophy. In place philosophy, the concept of "place" refers to a particular space in time, made meaningful by the actions and interactions of people within it. Informed by place philosophy, an examination of the experiences that people perceive as meaningful situates those experiences within particular spaces, at particular times, as lived and interpreted by specific people.

The musicians in this study experienced their ensemble within a series of overlapping places. These places were constantly made and remade by the actions and interactions of participants, yet stabilized by iterative practices (Creswell, 2004) that made up the groups' praxes. As participants composed their ensembles through iterative practices, the ensembles in turn came to "compose" the musicians, constraining their performances to a repertoire of actions appropriate to each place (Stauffer, 2012, p. 438).

As the range of available actions was constrained, so too was the range of potential meanings. In each group, participants played certain repertoire, rehearsed in certain ways, socialized at certain times, and thus constructed meaning in similar ways and derived meaning from similar experiences. Music groups may be socially constructed, but they are individually

experienced and understood. Each participant viewed his or her group from a unique perspective and what each individual perceived as meaningful was consequently distinct.

Principles of Meaning

The second research question guiding this study concerns whether participants' perceptions and experiences suggested underlying principles of meaning and value in instrumental music groups. I observed that meaning is situated, variable, and complex. Principles of meaning and value are individualized and unique. The findings of this study, however, suggest two important conditions in which meaningful experiences are more likely to occur. These two conditions point to underlying principles and may attribute to further investigation.

Personal meaning and motivation. First, group music participation is more likely to be meaningful when students are able to achieve in ways that are important to them. For meaning to occur students first need to possess the ability to define achievement and subsequently attain it. They need the skills, knowledge, opportunities, and support necessary to be successful. Support from a skilled instructor and peers can also provide a dynamic that encourages learning and growth. Educators also need to understand what constitutes achievement for students in a particular learning context. As individuals, students may perceive achievement as meaningful when it pertains to individual goals while some students may also identify with goals established by superiors or role models.

In order to achieve with meaning students must be emotionally invested. A desire to succeed with risk of failure entails commitment and a desire for growth. In this study, students who committed their emotional energy to meeting their goals found their accomplishments meaningful. When students doubted their ability to succeed in meaningful ways, they hedged their emotional investment in the outcome.

Meaning and Music Education

Instinctive meaning. I began this investigation by examining existing arguments within the field of music education pertaining to what was meaningful for music students and suggested that we examine more closely what is meaningful to students. This study contributes to that research by examining meaningful participation from the perspectives of instrumental music students. It provides a nuanced description of the dimensions of meaning experienced by participants within an established music ensemble.

What students generally perceived as meaningful had to do with fundamental human concerns: feeling a sense of competence and personal agency, finding a place and connecting with others, discovering and expressing one's uniqueness, finding common ground and experiencing communion with others. Meaningful experience is not incidental and requires time, commitment, and emotional investment. Engaging regularly in musical experiences that address the fundamental human concerns (achievement, relationships, identity, expression and communication) may form habits of mind and behavior that are applicable to music and life.

Subjective meaning. In the process of conducting this study I have become more conscious of language and its implications. In the question, "What do students find meaningful?", the word "find" suggests that students are passive recipients of meaningful experience and that they discover meaning as opposed to actively creating it. Meaning is subjective. Teachers can shape praxis in order to create conditions conducive to meaning, but perception is unique. Kraus (2003) reached a similar conclusion in his study of flow experiences in a university wind ensemble. He found that while certain conditions might make flow experiences more likely, flow was ultimately dependent on the mindset of individuals.

Suggestions for Practice

Personalization. Kratus (2007) argued that educators should find ways to make education "potent and irresistible" to students, and suggested possible alternatives to band, choir, and orchestra (p. 46). I agree that school music offerings have not, thus far, reflected the diversity of musics in our culture or the kinds of music of interest to modern adolescents. Personalizing course offerings to the needs and interests of students may increase the likelihood that students will emotionally invest in their own success. Rather than focus attention on specific types of ensembles, attention can be focused on students and creating contexts that facilitate meaning in multiple, variegated ways. This may prompt us to offer different course subjects with different praxes, as Kratus (2007) suggests. School music offerings should provide opportunities to be successful in ways that are meaningful to the students in the group and should take place within a safe, supportive, and connected community. Those two conditions are integral so student achievement and growth but also require a responsive and reflexive teacher.

Growth and personal development. In this study, music was not limited to musical engagement in other contexts. The experiences that students in this study valued most related to fundamental human concerns. Focusing on transition should also involve conscious influence and illustrating how students can continue throughout life in ways musical and non-musical. Students' meaningful experiences related to achievement, relationship, identity, expression and communication and music. To be conducive to these kinds of meaningful experiences, school music groups should enable students to achieve with relatable methods within learning environments where students feel safe, supported, and connected. For teachers, this approach requires asking questions that extend beyond the standard (and important) question: "Are all students in my group achieving success?" It also involves asking questions such as: "Are

students achieving in ways that matter to them?" "Are they forming positive relationships and if not, what can I do to help?" "Do they have opportunities to be seen and heard, both when making music and within the social environment of our group?" "Do they feel they belong here, and that they are part of something good?" "Do they have opportunities to express themselves and communicate with others, and do they have the skills and knowledge necessary to do so?" "Are they connecting in some way with the music we're making, and do they have opportunities for choice?" And finally, "What are these students telling me explicitly and implicitly about the experiences they find meaningful, and how am I responding?" These questions are responsible, ethically grounded, and may extend far beyond performance goals to significantly and positively influence student quality of life.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This appendix reproduces an example of the interview protocols used in the interviews conducted by the researcher.

INTERVIEW TOPICS

I will conduct targeted, semi-structured interviews with students and their ensemble instructor at the times and locations most convenient to them. The interviews will consist of formal questioning but will also provoke dialogue which can lead to conversation related to the subject matter. I will speak formally with student and educator participants for approximately 30 minutes each with the interviews focusing on the following questions:

- Interview Questions

1. What is your age?
2. How long have you been playing music?
3. How long have you been a member of this ensemble?
4. Do you look forward to participating in this ensemble?
5. What is your favorite part about playing your instrument in a group setting as opposed to solo?
6. Do you feel as though you have more of a connection with music when you play solo or with a group?
7. How would you describe a meaningful musical experience?

8. What are some examples of personally finding meaning in a musical experience?

9. What aspects of participating in this ensemble are most meaningful to you?

10. How have your meaningful musical experiences influenced your engagement with musical endeavors?

    1. Continuing to enroll in ensembles?

    2. Practicing/developing skills?

10. What motivates you to practice your instrument?

11. Was there ever a time where you were not motivated to play or practice music?

        1. If so, why did this occur?

        2. How and when did this lack of motivation end?

        3. Has this occurred since then and if so, why?

12. What aspects of practicing music are most meaningful to you?

13. Do you prefer practicing or performing? Why?

14. What steps do you take to stay consistently inspired and motivated to practice and perform?

15. How much time do you spend practicing daily? Weekly?

16. Is your practice time regimented and structured? If so, what motivates you to commit to this routine?

17. Does practice translate to confidence on your instrument?

18. Does confidence influence your motivation? If so, how?

19. What is your most memorable musical performance?

20. What made that experience so meaningful to you?

21. Have you experienced this since then? If so, when?

22. What are your musical performance goals?

23. What motivates you to reach them?

24. What obstacles are in your way and how do you plan to overcome them?

25. Why are you a musician?